

Minutes of the Budget Hearing February 2, 2016

Members present: Jim Andersen, Chairman, Lynn Sweet, and Bryant Scott

In attendance: Brian Monohan, Mike Richard, JoAnn Brown, Adam Black, Paul Yergeau, Sr., Lester Huckins. Scott Young, David Ekstrom, Charlie Burnham, Lucinda Kerivan, Susan Rizzi, Kurt Wuelper, Scott Whitehouse, George Preston, Mike Harrington

The Public Hearing for the review of the Town budget was called to order at 6:00 PM.

Mr. Andersen opened the public hearing by welcoming all those in attendance and stating that the purpose of this public hearing is to review the proposed 2016 budget and certain warrant articles to be voted on at the March 12, 2016 Town Meeting. Town Meeting will commence at 8:30AM at the Strafford School.

Warrant Article 1 for the election of officers to be held on March 8, 2016, at the Strafford Town Hall was read.

Warrant Article 2 which requests an appropriation of \$355,000 for Capital Improvements of roads within the Town boundaries at the discretion of the Road Agent. There was no discussion.

Warrant Article 3 was read. This article requests an appropriation of \$553,744 for the operation and maintenance of the Strafford Police Department. Two questions about health insurance coverage were asked. Chief Young answered that officers are fully coverage, but 2 person and family plans are 90/10. The Board explained that the plans offered will not be subject to the "Cadillac Tax". Chief Young went on to explain that after review of officer salaries of surrounding/similar towns, he had recommended about a 10% increase on all officer salaries to put them in the average range. He also addressed a question about reducing the amount budgeted on the gas line with prices being lower saying that that line had reduced from \$18,000 to \$14,000. There was no further discussion.

Warrant Article 4 which seeks to raise \$10,000 to be placed in the previously established Capital Reserve Fund whose purpose is the purchase of future police vehicles and associated equipment. A question was asked about the status of the fund. Chief Young stated that the Town had put in \$10,000 last year and with this year's appropriation, they should come close to the purchase of the new vehicle. There were no further questions.

Warrant Article 5 for the appropriation of \$7,000 for the purpose of purchasing 7 ballistic vests for the Police Department. Chief Young made a correction, stating it should be \$8000 for 8 vests. He further stated that the "life" of current vests is expiring. A question was asked about

Federal funds available for the project. Chief Young stated that they had applied but had not yet heard.

Warrant Article 6 for the appropriation of \$338,411 for the operation and maintenance of the Strafford Fire Department and Rescue Squad was read. The Selectmen responded to a few questions as Chief Whitehouse was at a call. They had not adjusted this gas budget down as call volume is up already this year. The Selectmen explained that there was a \$19,000 repair to Engine 3. By cancelling some planned purchases, the Chief was able to cover that repair within his budget and not come to the Town for more money. Chief Whitehouse, back from the call, gave some clarification about lines with unexpended funds having the same 2016 appropriation as the prior year. Because of the costly Engine 3 repair, he had delayed paying for classes in which fire fighters were already enrolled. He continued by explaining the procedure for taking in and training new people in the department. No further questions were asked.

Warrant Article 7 to appropriate and expend \$1,400 for the extended warranty contract for the Auto Pulse to cover the period from 3/1/16-2/18/17, from the special revenue fund known as the Rescue Vehicle and Equipment Fund. In response to a question about the Auto Pulse, Chief Whitehouse gave a brief explanation of how it works and its benefit. There was no further discussion.

Warrant Article 8 for the appropriation of \$10,000 to purchase of equipment and supplies for the ambulance was read. Funding for the appropriation is to come from the Rescue Vehicle and Equipment Fund and not from taxation. A question was asked about the amount of money in the fund.

Warrant Article 9 was read. It requests \$27,420 to be taken from the Rescue Vehicle and Equipment Fund purchase 4 SCBA's whose service life is expiring. There was a brief discussion about the language of the article. A question was asked about purchasing reconditioned SCBA's. Scott explained that the life of a reconditioned SCBA is only 4 years and that the expiring ones may have some trade in value. He also explained what vehicles would carry the units.

Warrant Article 10 was read. It seeks to raise funds for 18 additional SCBA's. The purchase is to be partially funded by a Fire AFG grant with the remainder to come from general taxation. No purchases will be made if the granted is not awarded.

Warrant Article 11 to establish a Capital Reserve Fund for the purpose of repairs and/or replacement of existing dry hydrants in Town and to appropriate \$15,000 to be placed in the fund was read. Several questions were asked. Chief Whitehouse addressed the necessity for these repairs and outlined his priorities. Funds from last year's article were for used bridge hydrants; those installations should be completed soon. Establishing a CRF will enable the funds to be carried over from year to year; he estimates \$60,000 - \$70,000 will be needed to complete the project. Chief Whitehouse explained that the department conducts mandatory periodic flow testing and annual cleanouts on all hydrants.

Warrant Article 12 was read. Its purpose is to establish a CRF for the rehab or replacement of the Crown Point Fire Station and to appropriate \$50,000 to be placed in this fund. Chief Whitehouse addressed the article. The current 30'x24' building has some structural issues and only one engine currently fits in it; a custom built engine to fit the current building will be costly. He would like to demolish the building and reorient it 90 degrees, ultimately building a 40'x60' structure. He estimates a final cost of \$200,000 to \$250,000 and has a 3-4 year, best case scenario, timeline in mind. A question was raised about the size of the lot and acquiring more land. The lot is .11 acres. He will try to have estimates for the Town Meeting. No further questions were asked.

Warrant Article 13 for the appropriation of \$48,400 for the revaluation/statistical update of the Town was read. The Selectmen explained that this is mandated by the State and was put out to bid. The project will start in late spring and will be completed for the 2nd issue tax bill.

Warrant Article 14 to add \$25,000 to the Non-Capital Reserve Fund established for funding any future bridge repairs/construction was read. The Selectmen addressed the article by saying that the bridge on Barn Door Gap is earmarked by the State for repair and briefly explaining the process for State Bridge Aid. When asked if it will be like the other bridges in Town, they responded that it will depend on the recommendation of the engineers, but they would like to see the aesthetics maintained.

Warrant Article 15 requesting a \$500 contribution to the Bicentennial Fund was read. This is in anticipation of the 2020 Bicentennial celebration and is the same amount contributed last year. JoAnn Brown, President of Strafford Historical Society addressed the article and spoke briefly of the preparations being made.

Warrant Article 16 authorizing the withdrawal of \$25,000 from the Capital Reserve Fund established for library improvements was read. It will be used for new shelving, furniture, updated lighting for greater energy efficiencies and other improvements at the Strafford Hill Library article. The Board clarified that this appropriation would not come from general taxation. A question was raised as to whether the trustees had checked into securing funding from the PUC for the energy efficient lighting. Some discussion followed about the oversight of the funds and it was stated that the trustees, as elected officials, have oversight over all library expenditures. There was no further discussion.

Warrant Article 17, which requests funding for general Town operations, was read. Included is an itemization of that appropriation.

2 full time employees at the library whenever it's open, though he is grateful for volunteers. The balance in the Trustee account was discussed, as was its availability for use. The Selectmen will take his request under advisement. A final question was raised about the increase in the assessing line; additional expenses related to the revaluation are accounted for in that line.

Warrant 18 to request any further business be brought forward was read. A question was raised about what might be done to preserve the old Town Hall, now being used by NHDOT Division 6, which is slated for destruction in the spring of 2016. An idea was suggested, but no further discussion followed.

There being no further business to discuss, the Public Hearing was closed at 7:05PM.